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Metro Water District asking customers to consume less

> [Little rain, low groundwater cause concern](#) <

By Dale Quinn

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

A Northwest Side water provider is asking its customers to conserve by limiting the number of times they water their plants each week.

Metro Water's governing board passed a drought preparedness plan at its June 13 meeting. The district, which serves about 45,000 people in an area roughly north of River Road and south of Lambert Lane between Interstate 10 and Oracle Road, is in the second — or warning — stage of that plan. Stage 2 goes into effect when precipitation in the last year is 50 to 70 percent of normal and the overall groundwater level drops between 2 1/2 and four feet.

Metro Water's drought plan includes four levels from Stage 1 — alert — to Stage 4, which is crisis. The most extreme measures occur when precipitation in the last year is less than 25 percent of normal years and the groundwater level drops more than five feet.

In that situation, drought fees would apply to customers who use large quantities of water, and construction crews would be restricted from using drinkable water.

During Stage 2 — the current stage — Metro Water requests its customers limit landscape irrigation to twice per week between the hours of 8 p.m. and 8 a.m., asks people and businesses to avoid washing their cars and using outdoor misters, and encourages hotels and restaurants to conserve water.

Metro Water's Assistant General Manager Warren Tenney said the aquifer the district's wells draw water from fell an average of three feet last year. Even so, he said, the district is not running out of water.

"It's not like there's an immediate water shortage, but it is true that we are in a drought," Tenney said.

The Arizona Department of Water Resources requires that all water providers in the state have a drought preparedness plan in place by January 2007.

Oro Valley's Water Utility Director, Philip Saletta, said the town's drought plan is "in the works." He said Oro Valley has ordinances that can go into effect if the town needs to use extreme conservation methods. The town also has a water conservation specialist who will go to customers' homes and tell them ways in which they can conserve water.

"Regardless of whether it's a drought or average conditions, people need to conserve water and we want to help our customers as best we can to do that," Saletta said.

Since November 2005, Oro Valley has used reclaimed water to irrigate golf courses, and that has slowed the fall of the groundwater level.

In 2005, Oro Valley's groundwater wells dropped between two and nine feet. In the year before, they dropped as much as 12 feet, Saletta said.

Tucson Water, which serves customers in Marana, also is working on its drought preparedness plan. The plan will likely go before the City Council in November or December, said Tucson Water Conservation Program Manager Fernando Molina.

"We've been holding a series of meetings with Metro Water and other water providers to try and coordinate as much as possible on this," Molina said.

What does it mean?

- The Metro Water District is asking its customers to take steps to cut down on water use by doing the following:
- Limit landscape irrigation to twice a week and do it in the early morning hours or after sunset — between 8 p.m. and 8 a.m.
- Avoid washing automobiles.
- Don't use outdoor misters.
- It also is asking hotels and restaurants to conserve water.

Tucson Water differs from other local water providers because half of its supply comes from the Colorado River via the Central Arizona Project canal. So Tucson Water must look at water conditions throughout the Western United States when forming its drought plan.

Like Oro Valley, the city has conservation ordinances that could go into effect when necessary, Molina said.

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